The Honourable
Barbara A. Hagerman
Lieutenant Governor
of Prince Edward Island

An Island Together

Speech from the Throne

4th Session of the
63rd General Assembly
of Prince Edward Island

November 12th, 2010
at 2 p.m.

An Island Together

It is my honour and privilege, in the name of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, to welcome you to the 4th Session of the 63rd General Assembly of Prince Edward Island

Over the previous three sessions of the Assembly, we have seen that, working together, our Island has the capacity to achieve great goals.

In pursuit of such goals, our greatest strength is our unity of purpose. And in that spirit, a challenge that tests even one part of our Island will receive a collective and vigorous response.

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Over the past two years, our Island has grappled with the worst economic downturn to face the western world since World War II.

Our Island responded in a determined, unified and hard-working manner. We confronted the challenges – as individuals, as communities and as neighbours – and we overcame many of the difficulties faced by larger jurisdictions.

Thirty months ago, in April 2008, my government set out a new vision for Prince Edward Island – a vision of One Island Community.

That vision outlined over a hundred policy actions, the vast majority of which have been completed, or are well on their way to being completed. In the words of the 2008 Budget, it was a vision that sought to move beyond the short term – and pursue initiatives that would lay a sustainable foundation for generations to come.

To achieve this, the vision was accompanied by a plan:

- To foster an education system that meets the challenges and seizes the opportunities of a rapidly changing world
- To support a health care system that effectively responds to the needs of all Islanders
- To build an economy that encourages growth in all parts of our Island, and that builds upon a foundation of existing strengths
- To advance environmental stewardship to protect our land, water, and air
- To strengthen a united community in which all Islanders play a valued part – contributing to and benefiting from our prosperity and quality of life

Since the vision of *One Island Community, One Island Future* was first articulated, much has been achieved.

My government recognized that some difficult decisions and measures would be needed to achieve this vision – and that government could not and should not do this alone. We knew that we needed to listen to Islanders – and so we consulted with them on many fronts – through the Rural Action Plan ... the Kindergarten Commission ... the Disability Services Review ... the Commission on Land and Local Governance ... the Commission on the Future of Agriculture and Agri-Food ... the Child Protection Review ... the Summit on Learning – and many other areas key to a better future for our Province. We have consulted Islanders – and we have been guided in our actions by what they told us. Madame Speaker, I am pleased to say that my government has endorsed the vast majority of measures and directions recommended through our consultations.

We have consulted Islanders – and we have been guided in our actions by what they told us.

We have listened to Islanders – and we have worked to fulfill the new directions that we have developed together.

A More Secure, Stable, Affordable Electricity Supply: The PEI Energy Accord

Madame Speaker, building a strong future not only requires a strong vision and plan, but also requires Government to be responsive to changing circumstances as they arise. One such area of collective concern to Islanders – be it families, small businesses or larger export-producing enterprises – has been the high and rising cost of energy.

This Government is proud of the measures it has already taken with respect to energy policy. Upon coming to office Madame Speaker, we quickly implemented a gas tax cut of 4.4 cent per liter and capped gas taxes throughout our mandate. This measure has saved Islanders 35 million dollars since first being implemented.

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Through the establishment of the Office of Energy Efficiency we have helped over 4,000 homes across our One Island Community, resulting in an average 20 per cent reduction in home energy consumption – and in the year ahead, Island businesses will be helped to achieve similar gains under this program.

Madame Speaker, our focus on energy has extended to supporting seniors through home repair initiatives, low income families seeking relief from rising home fuel costs and expanding our efforts related to public transit.

Much has been accomplished, Madame Speaker, but much more is still required.

In this sitting of the Legislature, we will turn our attention and focus to the rising costs of electricity and the growing disparity our local ratepayers now face.

Over the past year, Madame Speaker, my Government has been vigorously examining ways and means to address a common concern across the Island – the rising cost of electricity.

For generations, Island governments have grappled with the challenges of our nearly total dependency on external and costly sources of electricity. My government has approached this challenge by developing structural changes which attack the roots of this problem.

As a result of collective efforts taken in the past year or so, primarily with our key electricity partner Maritime Electric Company Ltd., in the coming days my government will unveil its new *PEI Energy Accord*.

This Accord will set out a series of interrelated policy actions driven by three primary goals:

- Immediate rate reduction
- Price stability
- Establishing Prince Edward Island as the world leader in the integration of wind power

An early measure of this Accord will be the introduction of the *Electrical Rate Reduction Act*. Through legislative means, this Act will take specific aim at the Accord's first goal – immediate rate reduction.

Madame Speaker, as a result of this measure, beginning in March 2011, Islanders will see their electricity costs will fall by 14 per cent across all rate categories, and beginning in 2012, these costs will remain unchanged at the reduced levels for the second year of the Accord.

To put this in sharper perspective, collectively, Island ratepayers will pay approximately 25 million dollars less in electricity bills next year as compared to this year.

Madame Speaker, as a result of this measure, beginning in March 2011, Islanders will see their electricity costs will fall by 14 per cent across all rate categories, and beginning in 2012, these costs will remain unchanged at the reduced levels for the second year of the Accord.

The Accord, Madame Speaker, will not only focus on immediate rate reduction measures, but will also launch a number of longer term solutions to help our utilities deal with the complexities of electricity pricing. Included in this, Madame Speaker, will be the opportunity for Islanders across the spectrum to actively participate in shaping future solutions to the challenges that lie ahead.

The PEI Energy Accord will be successful because of our collective will to build a stronger future for our One Island Community. Islanders, businesses large and small, communities rural and urban will all share and play a role as we move towards a stronger, more competitive Province.

Investing in our Future: Education

Addressing today's economic fundamentals through measures like the Energy Accord is absolutely vital.

However, my government is also exceedingly cognizant of the need to prepare Islanders for the future.

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In the past year, historic changes to our education system have been introduced. These changes are well-considered, and follow a deliberate and focussed plan.

In September of this year, Island schools welcomed 1,400 kindergarten students into the public system.

Simultaneously, my government established a provincial early learning system for children aged birth to four – and 36 Early Years Centres opened their doors across our Island to almost 1,500 of our youngest children.

I am extremely pleased that these measures have vaulted our Island into a leadership role among Canadian provinces – providing Island children and families with an early childhood system that is accessible, inclusive, equitable and high quality.

This major step forward in the evolution of our education and early learning system took a great deal of shared planning and careful implementation by all partners. The smooth transition speaks well of the hard work and outstanding collaboration and cooperation of all partners – including the early childhood sector, the school system, parents, and my government.

In support of many of these improvements, the *Early Learning and Child Care Act* will be introduced this fall. And my government will continue working with the early childhood system to develop and open up to 14 additional Early Years Centres – further increasing province-wide access.

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In addition to improving programs for our youngest Islanders, my government is also modernizing our school system to prepare our children for the 21st century.

Ultimately, the key measure of educational success is the success of our students.

Over the past three years, schools, educators, and families have worked together on a range of measures to improve student learning and engagement – increasing literacy resources and programming, enhancing special needs supports, and developing and expanding measurement and assessments. These efforts are beginning to reap results, with strong improvement in Grade Three reading and writing outcomes.

Over the coming year, my government will increase its focus on improving student learning and outcomes in the intermediate and secondary school system to better prepare our children to enter and succeed in post-secondary learning and in the labour market. In June 2010, my Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development hosted a widely attended Summit on Learning to explore how we can best help our children and youth to achieve 21st Century Outcomes.

My government will continue to engage education partners in exploring and building on those ideas and new directions.

Teachers have always and will continue to be the heart of the learning experience. Despite declining enrolment, my government has increased teacher numbers over the past three years – and is maintaining teacher resources at the current level for both this school year and the next.

These measures have taken Prince Edward Island to one of the lowest student-teacher ratios in Canada – and further improvements will be achieved next year as enrolment continues to decrease. Over the coming year, increased emphasis will be placed on examining and planning for the human resources needed to continue improving our learning outcomes and supporting our children with special needs in the years ahead.

With regard to infrastructure, a process of renewal is underway, with the recent openings of Montague Senior High School, Stratford Elementary, and new kindergarten wings at several schools ... the planned construction of a K-12 school in Souris ... expansion at Miscouche ... and the changing role of six former school buildings to serve their communities in new ways. Through my government's investment of 12 million dollars, our bus fleet has been renewed – with over half the fleet now less than three years old.

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In our post-secondary system, September 2010 marked a new high in enrolment at Prince Edward Island's post-secondary institutions – reflecting the growing range of high quality programs, the expanded and modernized campuses, and the support of the George Coles Bursary and other measures to encourage our youth to enter and complete their post-secondary learning. The George Coles Bursary is also making higher education more affordable for our youth – with a 19 per cent drop in the average annual student loan since 2007.

In the coming year, access will continue to grow as Holland College launches its new West Prince Regional Training Centre, its Centre for Applied Science and Technology in Charlottetown, and, in partnership with the Confederation Centre, the recently announced School for Performing Arts.

Taken together, each of these measures reflect a larger plan to dramatically modernize our education system.

Our new early years system naturally complements kindergarten – which will better prepare a new generation of Islanders for success throughout their public school years. In turn, work will continue to improve financial and geographic accessibility to post-secondary programs – so that every Islander has an opportunity to prosper in a rapidly changing and demanding world.

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Building One Island Health System

Madame Speaker, when my government came to office, we knew that health care was a core priority of Islanders. We pledged to respond to that priority – effectively, thoughtfully and deliberately.

My government is taking a proactive, purposeful approach to transforming our health care system – because the health care challenge faced by all jurisdictions is immense.

Everywhere in the world, aging societies are posing increased demands on health care systems.

New technologies and drugs hold the hope of better outcomes and longer lives – but require major investments.

And costs continue to rise.

We all need a health system that embraces and integrates the services and programs upon which Islanders depend. In the April 2008 Speech from the Throne, I stated our priority in health – to build a sustainable, integrated health care system, one that shifts emphasis and culture toward wellness and primary care, placing patients, the community as a whole and sustainability above all considerations. That remains our priority.

We all need a health system that embraces and integrates the services and programs upon which Islanders depend.

My government has been clear from the outset that this transformation project would take a number of years to implement – and we are pleased to report we are on track in building One Island Health System.

This transformation requires a commitment to change and we acknowledge that sometimes change is not easy. We are encouraged by the spirit of co-operation and flexibility demonstrated by those working in the health system.

Major changes require strong, skilled leadership and clear lines of responsibility and accountability for decision making and delivery of health care services. In January 2010, the new Department of Health and Wellness and the new Health PEI agency were announced, fulfilling the advice of the Health Governance Advisory Council, and in May, a board of Islanders began to contribute their diverse knowledge, expertise and skills to building One Island Health System.

Although there is still work to do, much has been accomplished already. My government has adopted a number of measures which will allow the health care system to adapt – and meet the changing needs of Islanders.

First, my government knew that access to skilled health care providers was vitally important to Islanders – and took immediate action to respond.

A recruitment and retention unit was founded to find and keep the health care providers that Islanders need. A new Family Medicine Residency program was launched to train new physicians and foster closer links to our Island – reaching full implementation this past year with a complement of ten residents. The number of medical seats at Memorial University was doubled, and my government is working towards reserving these seats in the future for Island students who agree to practice here for two years upon becoming a doctor – so as to ensure that Islanders reap the full benefits of this investment.

Those measures have achieved significant increases in the number of family physicians practicing in our Province, taking the Island from 85 family physicians in the fall of 2006 to 96 today – and we will continue to work toward greater physician access for all Islanders.

Nurses also play a key role in our health care system – and the Accelerated Nursing Program at UPEI is increasing the supply of highly trained nurses to meet today's and tomorrow's needs – supported by the new School of Nursing currently being constructed at UPEI.

At the core of our primary health care network is the need to provide Islanders with accessible, affordable health services and to reduce pressure on our acute care hospitals.

As we begin to expand our primary care network we will, in the coming year, establish a new satellite centre in Murray River. This new service will complement and add to our health care services throughout the Southern Kings region. This centre will be part of a broader, innovative development planned in the downtown core of this beautiful community.

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Perhaps our greatest pressure on our acute care facilities is in the greater Charlottetown area with regard to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. The growing community of Cornwall and the area residents it serves are a major part of this catchment area. To help alleviate this situation, Madame Speaker, a new primary health care centre will be established in Cornwall.

The renewed primary health care system includes public health, mental health and addictions, and primary health care networks. These services are complemented by investments in drug programs, home care, and long-term care to meet the health care needs of Islanders in their homes and communities as fully as possible.

Over the past three years, my government's investment in drug programs has increased by over 11 million dollars or 46 per cent – adding 117 new drugs and expanded coverage for existing drugs to the formulary ... enabling palliative care at home ... adding coverage of blood glucose test strips ... and expanding coverage for low-income families. In the coming year, as more patented drugs become available in generic form, savings will be reinvested to add more needed drugs to the formulary.

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While the Palliative Drug Program has given Islanders the option to spend their final days at home, my government recognizes that this is not always possible. To provide the best possible care to Islanders who have built our society, a new Palliative Care Centre will be established, providing a caring and homelike setting for the last days of life.

These measures are essential to secure our ability to provide high quality health care to all Islanders through the challenging years ahead. But action is also needed to keep Islanders well.

In the coming year, my Department of Health and Wellness will work with Islanders to develop a strategy to promote the health and wellbeing of Islanders. Over the past century or more, each generation has enjoyed better health and longer lives than the previous one. We owe our children no less – and our health and wellness strategy will engage all Islanders in achieving that goal.

Our One Island Economy

Madame Speaker, economists have coined the term, the 'Great Recession,' to describe the recent economic downturn. Islanders were not immune to the impacts of this recession, particularly in our fishing and agri-food sectors.

While Canada saw an economic contraction of two and a half per cent in 2009, our economy remained stable overall, outperforming almost all other Provinces – showing the resilience of our industries and our people, supported by my government's sound economic development approaches and major capital investments.

Early in its mandate, my government realized that much more had to be done to position our Island's economy to excel in a changing world – to build a stronger economic future.

It was recognized that our best route toward increased prosperity required that we build on our existing economic foundations of agriculture, fisheries and tourism and add value to these sectors through new and innovative approaches.

Early in its mandate, my government realized that much more had to be done to position our Island's economy to excel in a changing world – to build a stronger economic future.

In January 2009, the Commission on the Future of Agriculture and AgriFood on Prince Edward Island set out a vision and a strategy to move toward a sustainable, stable, successful agricultural sector based on innovation and quality. In the current year, good crops and favourable market conditions hold promise to strengthen some sectors of the agricultural industry. Programs under the new Agriflex fund are helping farmers reduce their energy costs and generate new income opportunities through renewable fuels. The industry continues to diversify into new higher-value crops such as Identity Preserved (IP) soybeans, oilseeds, and novel crops responding to growing demand both here at home and around the world.

In the current year, good crops and favourable market conditions hold promise to strengthen some sectors of the agricultural industry.

In the fisheries, the lobster sector was hit hard by the economic downturn, with prices and demand plummeting. With the support of the Five Point Plan, the industry is working together to withstand and manage these pressures. This year, that hard work began to bring results as the industry saw record catches and slightly improved market conditions. In the coming year, my government will continue to support the lobster industry to develop and implement sustainability plans to secure the resource and this vital sector for the long term – including an extension of the low interest rate under the Low Interest Loan Program for the coming year.

Work will also continue to develop the aquaculture sector – including ongoing measures to enhance the quality and level of oyster stocks, and to address the threat of invasive species.

To strengthen our primary industries for the long term, my government is working with the agriculture, fisheries and food sectors to develop new, high-value products, expand our existing markets, and penetrate new markets. Island beef is getting top billing in Toronto, our soybean and canola sales are growing in Japan, marketing promotions have resulted in increased demand for high quality Prince Edward Island potatoes, our lobsters are being marketed in China, and our made-in-PEI Honibe honey drop product received global recognition in October as the best new food product in the world. As this global recognition of quality grows, our primary sectors should improve their profitability.

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The tourism sector saw very strong visitation and spending in the past year – despite the high Canadian dollar and the recession's damping impact on tourism demand. That success is built on the work of the tourism sector to provide high quality services and innovative products and events. New collaborative approaches such as the Culinary Alliance and the Cultural Action Plan are boosting visitation to all regions of Prince Edward Island, especially in the spring and fall. By linking our Island with quality food and experiences in the minds of visitors, these strategies are strengthening partners in agriculture, fisheries, and cultural industries. As we build and enhance our tourism product, innovative marketing techniques such as Regis and Kelly are showcasing our Island to new audiences and markets.

The calibre of these approaches is underscored by Prince Edward Island's recent nominations for five national tourism awards – three for industry and two for my government. I am pleased to congratulate Rodd Resorts for winning the national Award for Excellence in Human Resource Development.

A core element of my government's economic development approach is the Island Prosperity Strategy – which set out a comprehensive roadmap to invest in people, innovation, and infrastructure. The strategy identified new opportunities in aerospace, biosciences, information technology and renewable energy – and set out a comprehensive range of measures to develop those opportunities.

The wisdom of this approach was proved as the recession began to take hold.

By moving ahead strongly with economic diversification and infrastructure renewal, Prince Edward Island overcame many of the pressures that overwhelmed much of the world.

A fundamental response to economic uncertainty was the unprecedented 500 million dollar five-year Capital Plan. This plan has been augmented by federal economic stimulus and municipal partnerships – employing thousands of Islanders across the province, and renewing our infrastructure for generations to come. New and rebuilt roads and bridges are linking our One Island Community. Enhanced water and sewer systems are protecting our health, our water and our soil. New manors will provide our seniors not just with new buildings, but with a new and better way of providing homelike, nurturing care in their final years. New and enhanced sport and recreation facilities are strengthening our communities and supporting healthy lifestyles. New economic infrastructure such as the BioCommons in Charlottetown, rural broadband across the Island, and Rural Action Centers will further enable economic growth and diversification.

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The Island Prosperity Strategy is underway, and has seen strong progress toward its goals. Since the strategy was announced, over five hundred jobs have been created in its economic areas of focus and in related research areas – and further growth is expected over the coming year. By now, these sectors employ well over four thousand Islanders – including 1,200 in aerospace, with a further 80 new jobs just announced ... over 900 jobs in the biosciences ... and over 2,100 jobs in the information technology sector.

The value of the Island Prosperity Strategy lies not only in its direct employment, but also in its measures to strengthen our traditional industries – such as the two new Industry Research Chairs focusing on innovation related to our primary industries. Dr. Greg Keefe is leading research efforts in agriculture, and Dr. Larry Hammell is carrying out research in fisheries. The Graduate Student and Post-Doctoral Fellowship Program is backing Island-based research in areas ranging from cattle production and mussel farming to ocean-sourced medicines and nutritional supplements.

Madame Speaker, these innovative investments show and support what we already know – that in a unified Island community, urban and rural are part of the same world.

Each strengthens and supports the other in diverse ways. Our wealth and prosperity begins in our fields and estuaries, our manufacturing and processing plants, our inns and restaurants, and extends through a growing value chain to advanced bioscience products, research facilities, and information technology services that help our province innovate, compete, and succeed.

In January 2010, my government released the Rural Action Plan, setting out forty actions to build a stronger, more sustainable rural Prince Edward Island. As of today, ten of those actions have been fully achieved, 21 are well underway, and the remaining nine are being developed. As the plan is fulfilled, it will be renewed with new goals and measures in support of rural Prince Edward Island.

Madame Speaker, my government recognizes the importance of investing in the eastern and western areas of the province. In the coming year, construction will begin on a multi-purpose community centre in Murray River, which will house a number of needed services – including office and retail space, an Early Years Centre, and the primary health care satellite site noted earlier in this speech.

In January 2010, my government released the Rural Action Plan, setting out forty actions to build a stronger, more sustainable rural Prince Edward Island. As of today, ten of those actions have been fully achieved, 21 are well underway, and the remaining nine are being developed.

The Rural Action Plan is complemented by new and upgraded roads, community infrastructure and rural broadband in every part of the province ... by a range of investments through the Island Prosperity Strategy ... and by the work now underway to move forward with the recommendations by the Commission on Land and Local Governance.

Taken together, my government's economic measures have shielded our Island from the worst impacts of the global economic difficulties – and are creating a growing range of opportunities for Islanders.

Employment and earnings trends are showing some fundamental shifts in recent years. Over the past year, employment has hit new highs month over month compared to previous years. The strength of our economy is stimulating even stronger growth in our labour force, with rising participation at all age levels. Gains in full-time and full-year work have been especially strong among the core labour force aged 25 to 54.

Growth in skilled new jobs and increases in the minimum wage are driving improvements in earnings at all levels of the labour force. In 2007, one quarter of Islanders earned more than 20 dollars an hour – and by the end of 2009, this share had increased to one-third. In 2007, one Islander in six earned less than 9 dollars an hour – and since October 1, 2010, no Islander has earned under 9 dollars an hour. These gains translate into a 14 per cent increase in earned income between 2007 and 2009 – bringing increased prosperity to many Islanders.

In 2007, one quarter of Islanders earned more than 20 dollars an hour – and by the end of 2009, this share had increased to one-third.

Prince Edward Island has weathered the storm – but we cannot assume that smooth sailing lies ahead. Madame Speaker, my government will continue the strategic directions that have served us well – investing in people, innovation and infrastructure ... further increasing quality and sustainability in our primary industries ... linking our long established sectors to our new industries to strengthen both ... and diversifying into new areas of strength. In the coming year, my government will add to those strategies through the Energy Accord – reducing and stabilizing electricity rates for all Island businesses. As the Island becomes increasingly strong, competitive, and united, we look ahead to the coming year with a sense of cautious optimism.

Safeguarding our Environment

In Prince Edward Island, more than anywhere else in Canada, our natural environment is crucially important to our economic prosperity, our health, and our quality of life.

In Prince Edward Island, more than anywhere else in Canada, our natural environment is crucially important to our economic prosperity, our health, and our quality of life. Our soil, our water, wetlands and coasts, and our viewscapes are the foundation of our primary industries. Our rural areas are the most densely populated in Canada – with homes and resource land uses closely interwoven along every road in the province. Environmental stewardship is essential to ensure that our industries are sustainable long into the future, and that they grow and develop in harmony with each other and with their neighbours.

My government has acted on many fronts towards this goal.

Islanders are almost totally reliant on groundwater – and a number of decisive measures have been taken to fulfill the recommendations of the Nitrate Commission and secure this resource for the long term. Regulations on buffer zones have been strengthened. The *Lands Protection Act* has been amended so as to encourage protection of environmentally sensitive lands.

Our primary industries have worked in partnership with government and community watershed groups as stewards of our environment. The agricultural industry is increasing the number of environmental farm plans, removing sensitive lands from production, and adopting innovative new techniques to safeguard the soil, air, and water.

My government has supported and encouraged these efforts through such measures as crop insurance incentives and the Alternative Land Use Services program. The innovative ALUS program acknowledges and rewards the vital role that farmers play in safeguarding and enhancing our environment – the only such province-wide program in Canada.

My government is collaborating with industry to launch a pilot in two watersheds in the coming year, testing a new technology designed to take the guess work out of fertilizing crops. This will allow another significant step forward toward improving and protecting our water resources.

Through its economic stimulus and capital plan spending, my government has also worked with federal and municipal partners to achieve major gains in the quality and safety of our green infrastructure. In 2007, Prince Edward Island had the oldest wastewater treatment systems in Canada, the third oldest sewer systems, and the lowest investment in water systems of any province. Since then, water, sewer, and waste treatment systems have been built, expanded, renewed, and repaired throughout the province – serving Islanders and protecting our environment for generations to come. We commend our federal and municipal partners in this regard.

Through its economic stimulus and capital plan spending, my government has also worked with federal and municipal partners to achieve major gains in the quality and safety of our green infrastructure.

One Island Community for All Islanders

Madame Speaker, if we are truly to become One Island Community, we must do our utmost to make all Islanders part of that community. We must build opportunities for our youth ... support our families to raise the next generation ... cherish our seniors ... more fully include Islanders with disabilities in all walks of life ... and welcome the diversity that newcomers, Aboriginal Islanders, our Acadian and francophone community and others bring to our Island.

Madame la présidente, si nous voulons réellement former une île unie, nous devons faire le maximum pour accueillir tous les Insulaires dans la grande collectivité de l'Île. Nous devons créer des possibilités pour nos jeunes; appuyer nos familles qui élèvent la génération suivante; prendre soin de nos aînés; mieux intégrer les Insulaires qui ont des déficiences et accueillir les nouveaux arrivants, les Insulaires autochtones, la communauté acadienne et francophone et tous les autres qui contribuent à la diversité de notre Île.

Madame la présidente, si nous voulons réellement former une île unie, nous devons faire le maximum pour accueillir tous les Insulaires dans la grande collectivité de l'Île.

Madame Speaker, earlier I noted that my government will increase its emphasis on better learning outcomes and access to post-secondary education for our youth. These measures are vital for the long term – but they must be complemented by additional, targeted action to ensure a better life for Islanders who struggle with low and insecure incomes today – or who are only one mischance from falling into poverty.

Over the past three years, many measures have made life better for Islanders with low or fixed incomes – including expanded public transit … investments in social housing, energy efficiency, and home repairs … a twenty per cent increase in the minimum wage … expanded drug coverage and children's dental programs … increases in social assistance benefits and disability supports … tax reductions and freezes … and enhancements to early childhood programs, Best Start, and the Child Care Subsidy Program. Further benefits will flow from the measures set out earlier in this speech – including the savings to Islanders from the Energy Accord and continued implementation of the early learning system province-wide.

These measures are helping. But it is well known that recessions, and the economic and employment changes they bring in their wake, always take the heaviest toll on the most vulnerable. They are at greatest risk of being left out – and then left behind. As the world moves beyond recession, we must guard against this risk in our One Island Community.

Madame Speaker, my government recognizes the need to put priority on addressing the needs of those Islanders facing the greatest challenges. As an initial measure, on April 1, 2011, my government will end the so-called 'clawback' of the National Child Benefit from our families on Social Assistance.

More broadly, early in the new year, my government will release a Poverty Reduction discussion paper that will begin the process, in consultation with Islanders, of examining further options to improve the well-being of Islanders who are vulnerable or in need.

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Employment is a vitally important means to both reduce and prevent poverty. Prince Edward Island's relatively strong economic performance during the recession, and our range of employment programs and supports, have assisted many Islanders to maintain or increase their attachment to the labour force. In the year ahead, these supports will be examined to ensure that they remain relevant to the changing needs of Island workers. To maximize the benefits of this initiative, my government will also examine barriers to employment, and identify the incentives and supports that best encourage employment and increase earnings among Islanders with low or insecure incomes.

To continue building our One Island Community, my government will engage Islanders over the coming months in drawing these and other measures together into an integrated Social Action Plan – complementing and supporting our Island Prosperity Strategy and our Rural Action Plan.

Madame Speaker, my government welcomes the increasing diversity of our society – recognizing that diversity brings new ideas and resources to the Island and enriches our society and culture. To benefit from that diversity, we must take action to include all members of our society as fully as possible.

Madame Speaker, my government welcomes the increasing diversity of our society – recognizing that diversity brings new ideas and resources to the Island and enriches our society and culture.

With the establishment of the Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat last year, for the first time in Island history the provincial government offered the Mi'kmaq and Aboriginal organizations a central point of contact and an office dedicated to Aboriginal matters. We are pleased to be working with First Nations, Aboriginal organizations and other levels of government to address issues of mutual concern, and to uphold our commitment to closing the socio-economic gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Islanders.

My Government also recognizes the centuries-old contribution of the Acadian and Francophone community at all levels of Island of society. This recognition comes with the commitment to continue improving access to French language services. Guided by the advice and insights of former Supreme Court Justice Michel Bastarache, my Government will be working on a new *French Language Services Act*. Our approach for the new Act is anchored in the principle of balancing priority community needs, and Government's capacity to deliver. Our commitment also includes actively engaging the Acadian and Francophone community throughout the process.

Mon gouvernement reconnait également que la communauté acadienne et francophone contribue à toutes les couches de la société insulaire depuis des siècles. De cette reconnaissance découle un engagement envers l'amélioration continue de l'accès aux services en français. Guidé par les conseils et les idées du Maître Michel Bastarache, ancien juge de la Cour suprême, mon gouvernement travaillera à l'élaboration d'une nouvelle loi sur les services en français. Notre approche pour la nouvelle loi s'inscrit dans l'équilibre des besoins prioritaires de la communauté et de la capacité du gouvernement de livrer ces services. Dans le cadre de notre engagement, nous susciterons également la participation de la communauté acadienne et francophone durant tout le processus.

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Over the past decade, thousands of newcomers have chosen to make the Island their home. My government has worked on many fronts to establish and expand the services that our newest Islanders need. Over the past year, with the input of our newcomer communities, my government has developed a Settlement Strategy which integrates those supports and adds new measures to encourage social and economic inclusion of new Islanders in our One Island Community. That strategy will be tabled during this session of the Legislative Assembly.

Proud to Be an Islander

Islanders know that Prince Edward Island is special in many ways – the breathtaking beauty of our landscape and coasts, the hospitality and friendliness of our people, the richness of our culture and heritage, the quality of our food products. But it's also good to see it through the eyes of 'people from away.'

That happened in July. For four days, the eyes of North America were on our Island as Regis and Kelly broadcast from the Charlottetown waterfront – and spoke glowingly and sincerely of our province and its charm.

In the coming year, we will welcome many other visitors to our province. In February, the Scott Tournament of Hearts will take place in Charlottetown, followed by the music and excitement of the East Coast Music Awards in March. Looking further ahead, my government will work closely with the federal government to plan for the 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2014 – engaging communities across our province in celebrations that reach out to all Canadians, and developing a legacy for the future.

Today, Madame Speaker, we are all mindful of the solemn day of recognition that has just passed. We owe our veterans our profound gratitude for all that we have in our One Island Community. Their sacrifices have made this possible – and we pledge to continue building a peaceful, caring and inclusive society.

Madame Speaker, as we look to the future, we see new risks and pressures – but we also see new possibilities for social and economic prosperity in our One Island Together. We pledge to continue working with Islanders as we move strong and united into that bright future.

Madame Speaker, as we look to the future, we see new risks and pressures – but we also see new possibilities for social and economic prosperity in our One Island Together.

In the coming legislative session, Madame Speaker, we will bring forward a number of legislative bills, including:

The Electrical Rate Reduction Act
The Early Learning and Child Care Act
The Student Financial Services Act
The Pensions Act
The Highway Traffic Act

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberations.